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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this investigation was to determine the positions of editors of journals who were sent a questionnaire designed to investigate (1) policies concerning acceptance rates, major reasons for rejection, lag times to publication and (2) the implications of trends for efforts to disseminate scholarly work. Questionnaires were sent to 106 editors of journals, identified by Otto (1974), who typically publish articles pertaining to reading. Sixty-seven variables were statistically analyzed to determine current publishing policies, as well as anticipated trends. The data indicate a substantial increase in the number of manuscripts being submitted, resulting in drastic decreases in acceptance rates and extended lag time to publication. Failure to add to the current body of knowledge and poorly written articles were the most frequent reasons for rejection. Conclusions, expected trends, and suggestions for authors and editors are also discussed. Tables giving the policies of 55 educational journals are included. (Author/MAI)

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Publishing in Reading: Policies, Trends, and Problems

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Publishing in Reading: Policies, Trends, and Problems

Those concerned with the broad spectrum of educational interests and endeavors write for a multitude of reasons, and "Publish or perish," is often heard as a lament, a rationalization, or occasionally a belligerent command. Each writer soon learns that being able to write a good manuscript is just the beginning. The acceptance of an article is contingent not only on its quality, but also on format, length, and appropriateness of subject matter for the particular journal to which it is submitted. Even after acceptance for publication, an author still may wait two years or more to see his article in print.

The purpose of this report is twofold: 1) to attempt to explain the positions of 55 journal editors who responded to a questionnaire designed to investigate policies of educational journals in terms of trends in lag times to publication, acceptance rates, and major reasons for rejection, and 2) to consider the implications of these trends for all parties concerned with the policies of education journals.

Research Methodology

In 1976, a questionnaire was mailed to the editors of 106 education journals. Of the total 77 questionnaires returned, 55 contained sufficient responses to be included in a tabulation of the data.

The 55 journal names were then submitted to deans and department heads of 32 midwestern colleges and universities. Each was asked to

rank the journals on a scale of 1-9 (low to high) according to "achievement reflected by authorship in." Twenty-seven individuals representing 19 institutions responded with completed questionnaires. All journals receiving an average score of five (5) or higher were considered to have more prominent status. This data provided the basis for comments concerning trends in the policies of this subset of journals.

Lag Time

Table 1 presents the responses of all reporting journals concerning average review time, lag time from acceptance to publication, and acceptance rates. A comparison of the data for the years 1969/70 and 1974/75 for all journals reporting shows that the average lag time from submission to publication did not change substantially, despite the fact that 94 per cent of the editors reported a 30 to 80 percent increase in the number of manuscripts received. The negligible net change in overall lag reflected a slight decrease (1.1 weeks) in review time offset by an increase of 5.6 between acceptance and publication.

During the academic year 1969/70, the average time between original submission of a manuscript and its final publication was 35.7 weeks. The average review time was 10.5 weeks, with an average lag of 25.2 weeks between acceptance and publication. During the academic year 1974/75, the average time between submission and publication had increased to 40.3 weeks. There was a decrease in average review time (9.5 weeks), but this was more than compensated for by an increase in lag time (30.8 weeks) between acceptance and publication.

When compared to the average for all journals in 1974/75, the subset of the 28 more prominent education journals had both a longer average review time (10.5 vs. 9.5 weeks) and a longer average time between acceptance and publication (32.7 vs. 30.8 weeks). The average overall lag for the more prominent journals was approximately three weeks longer than the average for the total shown in Table I in 1969/70. By 1974/75, a similar comparison indicated an average increase of five weeks between the two groups of journals.

Acceptance Rates

The average acceptance rate for the 55 education journals in Table I was 34.8 per cent in 1969/70. By 1974/75, this figure had been lowered to 20.4 per cent. As one would expect, the average acceptance rate for the subset of the more prominent journals was substantially lower for both reporting periods. During 1969/70, the subset group accepted an average of 30.8 per cent of the manuscripts submitted, while in 1974/75, this group accepted 17.3 per cent. This relatively low average acceptance rate for the subset of more prominent journals reflects a rather dramatic decline between 1969/70 and 1974/75. Much of the success which these journals have had in stemming increasing lags to publication can, therefore, be attributed to this substantial average cut in acceptance rates.

Reasons for Rejection

The data shown in Table 2 indicates that the major reasons for rejection of manuscripts in 1969/70 were inappropriate subject matter

and poorly written articles. In 1974/75 however, failure to add to the current body of knowledge was largely responsible for rejection in both the subset and the total group of journals. Other major reasons, in order of importance to editors, were articles which were too superficial in terms of content, and inadequate or inappropriate research design.

Discussion

While the data presented here is only a sampling of the 67 variables studied, it does point out the magnitude of the effort to disseminate scholarly works. Editors reported that while the quantity of reading related manuscripts has increased drastically during the past several years, the quality has increased also. The factors that have contributed to increased lag times have apparently produced a better quality journal product. Several editors noted that in order to cope with the flood of good manuscripts, they have increased the number of editions per year, increased the size of individual editions, reduced the size of articles, or a combination of these factors.

As acceptance rates are continually reduced, more and more high-quality manuscripts will be published by presently less-renowned journals. This will likely increase the prestige and status of these journals, thus making them more attractive from the points of view of both authors and readers.

An additional force working to reduce the pressure on the journal system and to help cut the average lag time to publication is the introduction of a significant number of new reading related journals.

For example, (Brown, 1974) noted that no less than 19 such journals have appeared in print since 1970. Undoubtedly, the emergence of these journals is in response to market pressure.

In conclusion, the following measures are called for if the effectiveness and relevance of the reading journal system is to be maintained in the future: 1) an explicit recognition and open discussion of the problems and promise of the present journal system; 2) regular monitoring of the system as a whole in terms of the number of new submissions, review times, acceptance rates, and lag times to publication; 3) more coordination and cooperation among journal editors; and 4) a closer analysis of the demand structure for the emerging journals.

Reference

Brown, Norman B. "Price Indexes for 1974," Library Journal, 99:1775-1799, July 1, 1974.

TABLE 1

Lags and Acceptance Rates for Education Journals

Education Journals	Average Review Time (weeks) 1969/70	Average Review Time (weeks) 1974/75	Average Time From Acceptance to Publication (weeks) 1969/70	Average Time From Acceptance to Publication (weeks) 1974/75	Acceptance Rates (%) 1969/70	Acceptance Rates (%) 1974/75
1. Adult Leadership	8	12	32	52	30	10
2. *Alberta J. of Educ. Research	N/A	8	N/A	52	15	15
3. Am. Annals of the Deaf	12	12	24	32	N/A	50
4. *Am. J. of Mental Deficiency	24	52	48	64	35	20
5. Am. J. of Experimental Psychology	8	12	20	24	50	30
6. *Am. J. of Psychology	6	12	12	12	30	17
7. *British J. of Educ. Psychology	10	12	36	36	25	15
8. *Canadian J. of Psychology	10	24	36	52	30	22
9. *Child Development	12	12	36	52	30	18
10. College Composition and Communication	2	2	16	20	25	15
11. *Education	4	6	32	52	60	50
12. *Educational Leadership	10	15	26	48	25	15
13. *Educational Research	12	20	12	16	25	10
14. *Elem. English (Lang. Arts)	N/A	6	36	N/A	20	10
15. *Elem. School J.	6	6	36	52	10	10
16. *Exceptional Children	14	14	25	9	25	15
17. *Harvard Educ. Review	6	6	N/A	12	N/A	N/A
18. *J. of Abnormal Psychology	6	16	36	16	28	5
19. *J. of Clinical Psychology	3	3	4	6	30	10
20. J. of Communication	6	12	18	24	36	10
21. *J. of Counseling Psychology	6	8	25	40	35	19

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Education Journals	Average Review Time (weeks) 1969/70	1974/75	Average Time From Acceptance to Publication (weeks) 1969/70	1974/75	Acceptance Rates (%) 1969/70	1974/75
22. J. of Education	N/A	6	3	8	N/A	N/A
23. J. of Educ. Measurement	N/A	8	N/A	30	N/A	20
24. *J. of Educ. Psychology	2	2	24	36	20	5
25. J. of Educ. Research	N/A	8	N/A	40	N/A	10
26. J. of Exper. Anal. Behavior	7	7	16	16	50	50
27. J. of Exper. Child Psychology	2	2	24	40	30	25
28. *J. of Exper. Education	2	2	36	52	20	10
29. *J. of Exper. Psychology	1	1	12	12	15	5
30. J. of Gen. Psychology	5	5	36	52	32	8
31. *J. of Lrng. Disabilities	N/A	8	N/A	40	N/A	25
32. *J. of Reading	3	5	16	24	30	25
33. *J. of Reading Behavior	6	8	32	12	75	50
34. *J. of School Psychology	5	5	26	35	50	35
35. J. of Spec. Education	10	4	52	30	30	20
36. J. of Speech and Hearing Disorders	N/A	8	N/A	18	58	50
37. J. of Tchr. Education	N/A	24	N/A	24	N/A	1
38. J. of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior	N/A	4	N/A	24	N/A	15
39. *Journalism Quarterly	12	16	10	24	35	10

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Education Journals	Average Review Time (weeks) 1969/70	1974/75	Average Time From Acceptance to Publication (weeks) 1969/70	1974/75	Acceptance Rates (%) 1969/70	1974/75
40. Language Learning	8	12	15	20	50	35
41. Modern Language J.	12	16	16	12	35	10
42. National Assn. of Secondary/School Principal's Bulletin	N/A	5	52	52	N/A	20
43. Peabody J. of Education	2	4	30	36	20	9
44. Personnel and Guidance J.	12	12	16	24	40	20
45. Personnel Psychology	10	20	12	12	N/A	20
46 *Phi Delta Kappan	5	6	10	12	8	5
47. Psychological Reports	8	8	32	32	40	30
48. Psychology in the Schools	6	6	18	36	50	33
49. Reading Horizons	12	8	24	52	75	75
50. Reading Improvement	4	6	32	52	70	40
51. *Reading Research Quarterly	N/A	10	39	52	33	10
52. *Reading Teacher	N/A	5	N/A	25	N/A	15
53. School and Community	2	2	8	12	75	25
54. Theory into Practice	8	8	N/A	N/A	15	1
55. Today's Education	6	6	36	36	20	5

*Included in subset of more prominent journals

TABLE 2

Major Reasons for Rejection* of Manuscripts
by Education Journals (Shown in per cent)

	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i
For all the education journals in Table 1 (excluding N/A responses)									
1969/70	2	13	10	18	9	22	10	12	4
1974/75	4	6	9	14	3	16	11	31	6
For only the more prominent education journals in Table 1 (excluding N/A responses)									
1969/70	2	10	4	23	5	24	10	18	4
1974/75	1	11	5	17	4	19	13	27	3

*Code for major reasons for rejection

a. Too esoteric
b. Too superficial
c. Too speculative
d. Inappropriate subject matter
e. Author's weak or inappropriate credentials for the subject matter
f. Poorly written
g. Inadequate research
h. Does not add to the current body of knowledge
i. Other (explain)